



## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MODERN LETTERS

Te Pūtahi Tuhi Auaha o te Ao

### Newsletter – 14 December 2007

This is the 118th in a series of occasional newsletters from the Victoria University centre of the International Institute of Modern Letters. For more information about any of the items, please email [modernletters@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:modernletters@vuw.ac.nz)

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#### 1. The Rehearsal takes centre stage as Adam Prize winner

This year's prestigious Adam Prize in Creative Writing was awarded to Eleanor Catton for her novel *The Rehearsal* during a function at the Adam Art Gallery on Wednesday night. Supported by Wellingtonians Denis and Verna Adam through the Victoria University Foundation, the \$3000 prize is awarded annually to an outstanding student in the Masters in Creative Writing programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters. Earlier this year Eleanor Catton became the youngest writer ever to win the *Sunday Star-Times* Story Award.

Examiners praised *The Rehearsal* – the story of a sex scandal at a girls' school – as 'viciously funny, wonderfully fresh and bold – a dazzling new voice'. Damien Wilkins, co-convenor of the MA Programme, says the novel is a remarkable achievement, and adds that, among the work submitted for final assessment by the twenty MA students, 'there were several books worthy of winning the Adam Prize,

and a number of fiction writers and poets are sure to figure in our literature in the future.’

In addition to the annual Adam Prize, the Institute also awards the Biggs Poetry Prize to recognise the potential of a graduating poet, and a number of project scholarships of \$5000 each, designed to buy the writer some time to continue polishing their folio after the year finishes. We’re pleased to announce that Joan Fleming is the recipient of the Biggs Poetry Prize, and project scholarships have been awarded to Pip Adam, Sarah Bainbridge, Mariana Isara, and Brent Kininmont. (See item 12. for the alternative awards ceremony that took place this week.)

## **2. Turbine 07 powered up**

Many of these writers appear in the brand new issue of *Turbine*, which was launched last night to coincide with the Adam Prize announcement. Alongside work from Eleanor Catton there’s a wide selection of poetry and fiction produced by writers in the two MA (Page) workshops this year, along with new work from established writers such as Andrew Johnston, Anne Kennedy and Elizabeth Smither, the 2008 Victoria University Creative New Zealand Writer in Residence (see 5., below), and a selection of work by emerging writers from around New Zealand. Curiously, three different writers offer their poetic takes on the Red Riding Hood story...

Audio files recorded at the Institute’s Writers on Mondays series allow some of the poets’ voices to be heard. We recommend starting with Dora Malech’s ‘Dreaming in New Zealand’ for its deft deployment of the New Zealand accent as heard by an American ear. And look out for our regular section ‘The Reading Room’, which features excerpts from journals kept by students during the year. These free and often unguarded entries explore a year of immersion in the writing life, with all its attendant excitements and agonies, and include some of the reflections engendered by the masterclasses taught by visiting international writers Eliot Weinberger, Richard Ford and Lavinia Greenlaw. *Turbine 07* was edited by Joan Fleming and Chris Price. Check it all out at <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/turbine/>.

## **3. Embassy Trust Prize goes to Orator**

The work of the writers in the Institute’s MA (Script) programme was recognised at a function at the Embassy Theatre on Monday night. A film-script that tells the story of a young Samoan chief who overcomes a fear of public speaking to make a speech that changes everything is the winner of the annual Embassy Trust Prize of \$1000. *The Orator* is the work of Tusi Tamasese and is based partly on his own reservations about public speaking, and also on his experience of growing up as a young chief on Upolu Island in Samoa. Scriptwriter Graeme Tetley says, ‘This humane script is beautifully and powerfully imagined, executed and achieved.’

Scriptwriting programme director Ken Duncum says the Embassy Trust Prize recognises the best script for a feature film written for the major component of the MA (Script) workshop. He says that while Tusi Tamasese's script was a clear winner,

the calibre of writing from the ten MA students this year was consistently high. 'The overall quality of writing increases year by year, as does the calibre of the students that apply each year for this very competitive course,' Ken Duncum says.

'This is indicative of how healthy the scriptwriting industry is becoming here and of how much more strength there now is in this art-form.' Students who complete the postgraduate programme leave the International Institute of Modern Letters with a high-quality full-length script that they can then offer to producers.

#### **4. Armslength**

Scriptwriting graduates are also making their mark in the theatre world. *Armslength*, written by 2006 IIML graduate Branwen Millar as her major project for the MA, will début at Circa Theatre from 18 January-16 February. Directed by Stephen Bain, it promises to offer a charming and witty insight into art, fame and love. As the publicity puts it, 'After a long, self-imposed exile, talented photographer Elsie reunites with her sister Ruth, to find Ruth has given up her promising career as a dancer to support her lover in his dream of becoming an artist. The sisters share secrets about their past, but it's the secrets others hold from them that threaten to explode their worlds apart.' To book, call Circa on 8017992, or book online at [www.circa.co.nz](http://www.circa.co.nz).

#### **5. Twain and tuatara twin interests of 2008 Writer in Residence**

The Institute will continue to be a hive of theatrical activity next year. As 2008 Victoria University Creative New Zealand writer-in-residence, playwright and author David Geary will be working on a play based on Mark Twain's 1895 lecture tour of New Zealand. Geary says he is particularly interested in an incident in Wanganui when a man broke into Twain's hotel room to warn him of an assassination plot. He is keen to hear from anyone with information, especially family stories, about Twain's nationwide tour.

Geary is the author of numerous successful plays, including *Pack of Girls* and *Lovelock's Dream Run*. He has also written for television and his short-story collection, *A Man of the People*, was published by Victoria University Press in 2003. In 2006 and 2007, David ran the Indigena Lab, a scriptwriting workshop for First Nation writers in Vancouver, and he will return to New Zealand from Vancouver Island to take up the 12-month residency. As well as writing the play about Mark Twain, Geary will work on a number of other projects, including a play for children based on Victoria University's internationally acclaimed tuatara breeding programme.

#### **6. From the whiteboard**

Literature was born not the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big grey wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him. That the poor little fellow because he lied too often was finally eaten up by a real beast is quite

incidental. But here is what is important. Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature.

— Vladimir Nabokov

## **7. Advance Australian writers**

In a story published in *The Australian* on 5 December, it was revealed that writers will be among the beneficiaries of the recent change of government across the Tasman. The Rudd Government will initiate a Prime Minister's Literary Prize for fiction and non-fiction books. Each winner will receive \$100,000, tax-free, with a further \$100,000 to be spent on administering and promoting the awards.

This places the new awards among the richest literary prizes in the world. According to *The Australian* they are surpassed only by the International IMPAC Dublin Literary award and the Man Booker, and are worth more than twice as much as Australia's current largest award, the Miles Franklin.

We note that, in setting up these awards, poetry has been overlooked by the Rudd government, which could perhaps take a leaf out of our prime minister's book in that respect. And in the spirit of collegial reciprocity, perhaps the Labour government here might consider adopting the Australians' tax-free approach to the New Zealand awards.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22872279-5001986,00.html>

## **8. Velvet resurrection**

Victoria University's creative writing students don't just appear on the page and stage. While the Embassy Trust Prize was being announced at the Embassy Theatre on Monday, an exhibition of paintings by writer and illustrator Fifi Colston was opening at the Deluxe Café right next door. It resurrects the art of painting on velvet with images of New Zealand birds, bugs and blossoms, and runs to 22 December.

## **9. Writing the landscape**

Our relationship with the natural world is both intimate and vital, yet we often have very little time for it. This creative writing workshop, convened by poet Dinah Hawken, offers the chance to explore some of the landscapes around you and to develop your potential as a writer by writing both poetry and creative non-fiction (such as travel accounts, journal entries, reflective essays). The course will also include a writing field trip to the Papaitonga Scenic Reserve, near Levin, with noted ecologist and nature writer Geoff Park as guide. In a time when both the natural world and words themselves are often misused, writing about the landscape is an act of commitment and faith. The course meets from 10 am - 1 pm each Friday, 1 March - 6 June 2008, and the application deadline is 29 January. Application forms and further course details are available from the International Institute of Modern Letters:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/modernletters/creative-writing/undergrad.aspx>

## **10. Tennyson Street Studio for Young Writers**

The Tennyson Street Studio for Young Writers is offering a two-week workshop programme for children with an interest in creative writing. The workshops will provide an enthusiastic, supportive and fun environment to practise and enjoy writing as a craft. We place an emphasis on sharing work with each other and helping our students find and develop their creative voice. The six tutors are all graduates of the MA programme in creative writing at the International Institute of Modern Letters, Victoria University, and include this year's Adam Prize winner. The programme will consist of four two-hour sessions. Classes run for two weeks in central Wellington, starting on Monday 14 January:

Year 5 & 6 – Monday and Wednesday – 9 to 11 am

Year 7 & 8 – Tuesday and Thursday – 9 to 11 am

The cost of the eight-hour programme is \$80 per student. Morning tea will be provided. For further information email [tennysonstreetstudio@gmail.com](mailto:tennysonstreetstudio@gmail.com), or phone Ellie Catton, (03) 337 4028.

## **11. New Zealand Society Fellow in New Zealand Studies**

Applications are now being invited for the second 'New Zealand Society Fellow in New Zealand Studies', which is offered by the Centre for New Zealand Studies and the New Zealand Society. Anyone is able to submit a research proposal, but priority will be given to supporting NZ Studies in countries where it is lacking representation and/or in underdeveloped subject areas. The award is for up to £1000 and is designed to support an airfare (or other travel costs) and up to 10 days accommodation in London. The Fellow will be based in the Centre for New Zealand Studies, and will be given publication support to assist with the dissemination of their research. The closing date is 31 January 2007, with the successful Fellow expected to commence their award in the twelve-month period after 1 April 2008. Applicants must provide a 900-1200 word outline of the research proposal (including an indication of intended research institutions to be employed), a short list of keywords, a relevant bibliography of 6 publications, and a CV. Applications can be emailed to [ian@ianconrich.co.uk](mailto:ian@ianconrich.co.uk)

## **12. Don't disrespect me**

In a week full of awards, we were glad to receive evidence that this year's crop of writers in the MA programme know they shouldn't be taken too seriously, in the form of the 'No Disrespect Intended' Tennyson Street Studio Literary Awards. There were awards – far too many to mention – for everyone. Among our favourites are The Southern Cross Prize for Medico-Literary Diagnostics, awarded to Sarah Bainbridge for the following verdict on Joyce Carol Oates: 'She is SO prolific! I suspect she has a hyperactive thyroid.' And the 'Oh No Really, Trust Me, Something Will Happen'

Prize for Grand Literary Bluff, handed out to Asha Scott-Morris for ascribing the title 'Before' to the first half of her novel in a self-confessed form of self-deception that something really was going to happen in the novel's second half. Then there was the 'Lonely Male' Award for Most Stoic Display of Endurance During Eight Months Confinement Among Female Poets (Brent Kininmont), and the Alison Holst Prize for Services to Workshop Goodwill through the Power of Baking (shared by multiple recipients). We leave you with the complete citation for the final prize in the NDI's:

'The "You're Not Wrong There" Award for Best Use of Understatement in Workshop is awarded to Damien Wilkins for the incontrovertible assertion, "Yes, the Second World War – that must have been tough," issued from way out on a limb during a workshop discussion on historical grounding of drama. Damien also takes The "Say What You Really Feel, Why Don't You" Award for Most Unequivocal Piece of Commentary Offered in Workshop: "As a story it's not working . . . and the characters are all demented."'

### **13. Au revoir 07 ...**

To our much-valued colleague Dora Malech, who is heading home to the Iowa winter. We look forward to following her brilliant career, and to the return visits she's promised to make.

To Andrew Johnston and Christine Lorre, who head back to Paris after their year of being Kiwi, taking their Wellington-born son Oscar with them. We await Andrew's book on contemporary New Zealand poetry with considerable interest.

To Kathy and Chris Hunter, the dynamic duo behind *LeafSalon*, who have headed off to the much warmer climes of Australia. We'll miss their enthusiasm for New Zealand writing, but hope they might transmit some of it to our larger neighbour. No word yet on whether they've succeeded in passing on the torch, so perhaps it's farewell *LeafSalon*, too (<http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/index.php>).

To Guy Somerset, *Dominion Post* Books editor, who's staying local but going national as the new Arts and Books editor of the *Listener* in 2008. We can no longer think of him as an absolutely exclusively Wellington phenomenon.

To all the MA students who've worked and (sometimes) played hard in 2007. We expect to be seeing and hearing many of their words on page, screen, radio and stage next year and in the years to come.

From us, as this is our last newsletter until February. For those still needing ideas for Xmas book buying, we leave you with some of the end-of-year best books lists to browse at the top of our Recent Web Reading.

### **14. Recent web reading**

Best books 07, here and there  
<http://www.stuff.co.nz/4317188a6619.html>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/books/review/notable-books-2007.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/books/review/notable-books-2007.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)  
<http://books.guardian.co.uk/booksoftheyear2007/story/0,,2216113,00.html>  
<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/omm/story/0,,2221289,00.html>  
[http://www.economist.com/books/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=10249833](http://www.economist.com/books/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10249833)  
<http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Guides/GoodReads/2007sbest/>

Richard Ford's idea of a good story

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2007/11/15/bofor111.xml>

Last call from Nigel Cox

<http://beattiesbookblog.blogspot.com/2007/12/phone-home-berlin-collected-non-fiction.html#links>

Our new poet laureate

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK0712/S00040.htm>

<http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/leggott/index.asp>

Maoriland fiction

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/CU0711/S00257.htm>

Some commonsense at last

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/blogs/shelflife/2007/12/13/a-parallel-judging-universe/>

The Russian Booker

[http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601088&sid=a4y\\_1zMdjHkg&refer=muse](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601088&sid=a4y_1zMdjHkg&refer=muse)

Critical decline

<http://www.tnr.com/booksarts/story.html?id=69e34cc4-6eb7-4c69-a5a7-24681dfac7c4&p=1>

Human history, compressed

[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/home/news/trans\\_Kors.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/home/news/trans_Kors.html)

Merriam-Webster's word of '07

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=3984898>

Mathematical rap

[http://cs.fairfield.edu/%7Eesawin/Rap/RAP%20VideoMed\\_Prog.mov](http://cs.fairfield.edu/%7Eesawin/Rap/RAP%20VideoMed_Prog.mov)

Very much worth a go (short story competition)

<http://www.newshortstories.homestead.com/submissions.html>

Six Pack competition call for entries 2008

<http://nzbookmonth.co.nz/>

Trivia index

<http://intercapillaryspace.blogspot.com/2007/11/ebook-7.html>



OUP considers Kindle

<http://blog.oup.com/2007/11/kindle/>

Hue & Cry reviewed

<http://lumiere.net.nz/reader/arts.php/item/1411>

Poetry making money

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/chinese-poems-funny-money/2007/11/19/1195321693744.html>

Flying with the All Blacks

[http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/ariel\\_leve/article2924202.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/ariel_leve/article2924202.ece)

Christchurch comes of age

[http://www.potatocongress.org/newsroom\\_detail.cfm?n\\_id=148](http://www.potatocongress.org/newsroom_detail.cfm?n_id=148)

Janet Frame

<http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/titlepage.asp?isbn=1852247894>

Flannery O'Connor Chili

[http://www.stewart-onan.com/html/flannery\\_o\\_connor\\_chili.html](http://www.stewart-onan.com/html/flannery_o_connor_chili.html)

Redeployed place names

<http://liffrevisited.blogspot.com/>

Independent theatre

<http://www.theatreview.org.nz/news/news.php?id=109>

Norman Mailer interview

[http://www.theparisreview.org/media/5775\\_MAILER.pdf](http://www.theparisreview.org/media/5775_MAILER.pdf)

Norman Mailer's self-obituary

<http://www.bostonmagazine.com/blogs/boston/2007/11/14/mailers-death-we-called-it/>

Keeping warm

<http://kitsunenoir.com/blog/2007/11/18/the-bearded-cap-by-vik-prjonsdottir/>

Econometric haiku

<http://www.marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2007/11/econometrics-ha.html>

Rice game

<http://www.freerice.com/>

George Saunders

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQS65RAeoJU>

Why women leave Dave Hickey

[http://www.believermag.com/issues/200711/?read=interview\\_hickey](http://www.believermag.com/issues/200711/?read=interview_hickey)



Listlady starts to gain an international following  
<http://readersandwritersblog.com/2007/11/15/list-while-i-woo-thee/>

## 15. Great lists of our time

50 sundial mottoes from a list of more than 2000 collected by sundial maker James Stewart, who worked in Invercargill until his death in 1933. Bruce Christie of the Plant Sciences Department at Massey and great great-grandson of James Stewart supplied the list, but of course the indefatigable Listlady drew it to our attention.

- 1 A day may prime thee, improve this hour.
- 2 Moved by the light.
- 3 A stick in time saves mine.
- 4 On this moment hangs eternity.
- 5 To thee that mourn the hours are slow  
But with joyful swiftly go.
- 6 The gliding hour flies on its fitful wings.
- 7 Come boys now's the hour.
- 8 Learn ze, years pass by like running water.
- 9 Snatch the present hour, fear the last.
- 10 As a shadow such is life.
- 11 Look at me and pass on.
- 12 By the shadow shall I mark time.
- 13 Be thankful, watch, pray and work.
- 14 The sun who guides the heavenly bodies produces the shade.
- 15 Come light visit me.
- 16 Count all the hours lost which are not accompanied by some  
worthy deed.
- 17 With the shadow nothing, without the shadow nothing.
- 18 To God alone be the glory.

- 19 Learn to live and die well.
- 20 The Lord is my light.
- 21 Perhaps the last.
- 22 Go your way into His courts with thanksgiving.
- 23 Let the slight shadow teach thee wisdom
- 24 Evil be to him who thinks evil thereof.
- 25 I count bright hours only.
- 26 I tell only sunny hours.
- 27 I am a shadow, so art thou,  
I mark the time, dost thou?
- 28 Amidst the flowers I tell the hours.
- 29 The clock the time may wrongly tell,  
I never if the sun shines well.
- 30 Time flies, eternity draws near.
- 31 Lead kindly light.
- 32 Let not the sun go down on your wrath.
- 33 Let others tell of storms and showers,  
I tell only sunny hours.
- 34 Light is the shadow of God.
- 35 Night comes when no man can work.
- 36 Like a true fireman, I am always ready.
- 37 He hath made his choice aright,  
who counted but the hours of light.
- 38 Till the day dawn and the shadows flee away.
- 39 My time is in thy hand.

40 Man wants but little here below,  
nor wants that little wrong.

41 Only as I abide in the light of heaven  
do I fulfil the will of my maker.

42 They pass by and are scorned.

43 So passes the glory of the world.

44 The sun guides me the shadows gone.

45 Tak tent o'time, ere time be tint.

46 Time passes as a shadow.

47 Time flies, death urges, knells call, heaven invites.

48 With warning hand I mark times rapid flight,  
From life's glad morning to its solemn night.  
Yet through the dear God's love, I also show,  
There's light above me by the shade below.

49 When thou dost look upon my face,  
To learn the time of day:  
Think how my shadow keeps its pace,  
As thy life flies away.  
Take, mortal this advice from me  
And so resolve to spend  
They life on earth, that heaven shall be  
Thy home when time shall end.

50 I stand amid the summer flowers  
To tell the passage of the hours.  
When winter steals the flowers away

I tell the passing of their day.

Man whose flesh is but as grass

Like summer flowers thy life shall pass

While time is thine lay up in store

And thou shalt live for evermore.

<http://www.sundials.co.uk/mottoes.htm>.

<http://thelistserver.blogspot.com>